

**Statement by  
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Forsyth County, NC Board of Commissioners**

**House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy  
And Human Resources  
April 12, 2006  
Winston-Salem, North Carolina**

Good morning. We appreciate the Subcommittee's interest in helping state and local governments to deal with the effects of illegal immigration. This is certainly an issue that is very much on the minds of our citizens here in Forsyth County.

Immigration, particularly by Hispanic people, is not new to North Carolina. Tobacco was, and still is, a very labor intensive crop. Immigrants have been coming here for many years to work in tobacco. It may be that the agricultural tradition was a bridgehead for the subsequent immigration that has made North Carolina among the states most heavily impacted by the problems of immigration.

Immigration has certainly caused an increase in the need for local public services, particularly in education, health services, social services, and law enforcement.

Our local public schools are now comprised of 8.5% non-native English speaking students, up from 3.9% in 2000. Our social services caseload is about 19% Hispanic, also a substantial increase in recent years. In our public health department, 38% of the clients are Hispanic. At a local outpatient facility, 34% of the patients are Hispanic. Of the prisoners in the county jail, about 11% are currently Hispanic.

As this Subcommittee knows, it is often very difficult for us to differentiate between legal and illegal immigrants, or to identify the children of illegal immigrants who are entitled to citizenship. In most public service venues, we are prohibited from asking about citizenship. With many services, it would be illegal or else morally indefensible to withhold service anyway.

Most estimates of the percentage of illegals seem to be entirely anecdotal. Based on the most reliable information we can get, it may be that 46% of the immigrants in our county are illegal. Many people place the estimate much higher.

If 50% is nearly correct, then, by extrapolation, illegals are annually costing this county government:

- \$4,082,000 in education;
- \$894,000 in public health department services
- \$942,000 in law enforcement, and;
- \$575,000 in social services

The problem of illegal immigration is very vexing for us. We respect the people who come here legally to work and make a new life for themselves. We also understand the desperation that causes people to come illegally. But we are a nation of laws and our laws and policies concerning immigration must be practical, and they must be followed. Our citizens are angry and concerned about illegal immigration.

At the local level, we need help with the impacts of immigration period – not just illegal immigration. If it is sound national policy to encourage and allow massive immigration to provide manpower for the economy – then we need help in providing services for this influx of new people. The impacts on us are really the same if these immigrants are new citizens, guest workers, or illegals.

If the national government needs help to enforce our immigration laws, we will be glad to cooperate – but we will need financial assistance. Our local law enforcement and justice systems already have their hands full.

In recent years, local governments have had to make extraordinary adjustments to accommodate immigration – particularly of Hispanic persons in this area. We are willing to do our part. But when we are impacted so dramatically by Federal policy – or Federal indecision – we need Federal help.